



County entry in festival parade is pretty in pink

(B/W 5X7 photo provided by NCBF of balloons in warehouse with article in "GO" section, story/photo did not appear in *Columbia Flier*)
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HOWARD COUNTY TIMES

by lane page

Ever since a brainstorming session last January, the folks at Howard County Tourism have been thinking pink. Now executive director Rachelina Bonacci and company have got County Executive James Robey and crew doing so as well.

"Blossoms of Hope: the Howard County Cherry Tree Project" will participate in this year's National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade in Washington from 10 a.m. to noon, April 8 with three of the biggest (15-foot x 15-foot) cherry blossoms ever seen - balloon floats each tethered to 16 hot-pink-T-shirt-clad volunteer balloon wranglers - wafting down the 10-block route on Constitution Avenue between 7th and 17th streets.

Among the Howard County marchers will be Sharon Zamkoff of the cherry tree project's beneficiary, the Claudia Mayer Cancer Resource and Image Center; Sue Emerson of Savage Mill; Robey spokeswoman Victoria Goodman; Michelle Healy of Howard Bank; Ann Johnson, general manager of the Belmont Conference Center; Karen Knight, assistant to County Councilman Charles Feaga; Christie Lawson of the Howard County Library; John Webster, a sponsor of one of the trees already planted here; and Bonacci herself, in pink newsboy cap to match her shirt.

They'll be accompanied by Robey and wife, Janet, the honorary chairwoman of Blossoms of Hope, riding along in a brand new, bright red Mustang convertible courtesy of Apple Ford.

Ten cancer survivors and representatives of the Claudia Mayer Cancer Resource and Image Center will have VIP grandstand seats at the parade.

Blossoms of Hope's goal, to have 1,000 pink Kwanzan cherry trees planted across Howard County and blossoming simultaneously each April, has been almost half accomplished since its announcement in September 2004. Most have been planted on public land (parks, libraries, lakes, community centers and historic sites), on corporate partners' land and along state highways.

"D.C. has 3,000 cherry trees, and at 225 square miles we're lots bigger than the District," Bonacci says with enthusiasm. "Maybe someday we'll have even more trees than they do," she speculates optimistically.

After all, when Robey announced the project, he described it as "a vision out of which a new, unique countywide spring celebration may take shape, one that may ultimately become a signature event for Howard County and maybe even the state."

But the project also represents hope to those suffering from cancer, and not just symbolically, as a portion of each sponsorship fee is donated to the Claudia Mayer Center.

None of which is to take anything away from D.C.'s festivities, since the Kwanzan cherry blossoms several weeks later than the varieties planted in the District.

Forty of the bloomin' beauties in Centennial Park (where Bonacci convinced the county Recreation and Parks and Public Works departments to designate one of the street names Blossoms of Hope Way, complete with cherry pink street sign) will be officially dedicated by Robey at 10 a.m. on Arbor Day, April 28.

As soon as that celebration is over, project organizers will be getting to work on arrangements for the neighborhood level of the program by which private individuals can purchase these trees. Details should be announced in September.

In the meantime, those who can't make it downtown to see the parade can see it live on WJLA-TV, channel 7 and on cable via NewsChannel 8.

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